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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0722

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000640

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/04/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: "WE NEVER TALK ANYMORE" MAURITANIA JUNTA WANTS TO  
BE SEEN TO BE TALKING

REF: USUN 986

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) The USUN Demarche: The recent Mauritanian demarche on US PermRep Ambassador Khalilzad reflects the junta's frustration that the U.S., while maintaining an active dialogue on security matters, has not engaged in direct political talks with the regime as have some of our European partners. On some of the specifics of Mauritanian PermRep Ould Hadrami's comments, post would beg to differ:

-- Contact Policy: Ould Hadrami is correct that the Mission has not sought out meetings with the military junta's "Prime Minister" or his new cabinet; however, we would do so if necessary to promote the return to constitutionality or as needed for vital operational or security issues. We would also respond if convoked by any minister but, so far, nobody has asked to see us.

-- Past Meetings: Ambassador Boulware has met three times with General Aziz since the coup and has spoken to him once on the phone -- in all cases directly related to the return to constitutionality.

-- Meeting with President Abdallahi: The Ambassador has repeatedly requested to meet with President Abdallahi but the request was never granted.

12. (C) The need to be seen talking: We have noted the regimes use of meetings with foreign officials as "evidence of dialogue" regardless of the substance of what was said. "Prime Minister" Laghdaf's return from the October 20 Paris meeting was hailed in the government-controlled press as a significant step to better explaining Mauritanian reality to the Europeans even as the Europeans called the meeting a complete failure. The regime's "Foreign Minister" returned from a meeting in Dar-es-Salaam with AU Chairperson Kikwete with a similar regime message of success even though Kikwete roundly condemned the coup. Meetings between visiting foreign delegations are always played up in the official media as a sign of return to diplomatic normalcy. The few meetings with U.S. officials have not played well for the regime because we brief non-government press afterward. The regime has multiple avenues of communication with the Mission should they really want to have a serious political dialogue -- we just haven't seen the desire yet.

13. (C) But no dialogue: While the regime may say it wants

"dialogue" with the U.S., we have seen no signs of any movement from their "you must accept the coup as a fact" attitude they have held since the coup. European diplomats noted that the junta's presentation at the October 20 Paris meeting was as hard-line as any they had heard since the coup. The lack of any effort to directly address any of the serious questions posed by the EU frustrated Europeans who might support a "pragmatic" resolution since they were given nothing to work with. The second visit by the African Union's Lamamra found General Aziz backsliding from previous commitments -- which likely contributed to the AU PSC's decision to issue its October 6 "ultimatum."

¶4. (C) A discussion they can control: After several delays, the regime continues to speak about a National Dialogue that will lead to a consensual political path forward; however, that dialogue is to be managed by the military regime (as it did in 2005). The FNDD has rejected any participation in any negotiations without the prior release and full participation of President Abdallahi. The regime continues with a "Abdallahi who?" refrain suggesting the president is so marginalized that he is no longer politically significant. With an anticipated anti-coup majority in the Senate when it meets this month, the regime's contention that "the Mauritanian people support us" will be harder to maintain.

¶5. (C) They just don't get it: The regime's leadership (particularly Aziz) still seems confused about the strong negative reaction to the August 2008 coup when, from his point of view, he is simply following the same script that worked so well in 2005. We have seen some fissures among the

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military leadership (but nobody yet ready to openly defy Aziz) and press commentary that "Prime Minister" Laghdaf and many other ministers rue their decisions to ally themselves with the military.

HANKINS